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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: LESOTHO: THE STRIKE THAT WAS A GUTTERBALL

REF: A) MASERU 93 AND PREVIOUS

1. SUMMARY: Wednesday, February 28, 2007, was the "strike that wasn't" in Lesotho. Rumors and pamphlets swirled through the capital and numerous interior towns after the weekend's political rallies that a potentially disruption work stoppage would occur. In a positive sign for the acceptance of the results of the February 17 National Assembly election, or at least an indication of a preference for less disruptive methods to address election grievances, the day passed without any notable civil disturbances. Reportedly, the new All Basotho Congress (ABC) party withdrew its support of the "direct action". END SUMMARY.

Rumors, Rumors

2. During a well-attended political rally on February 25, All Basotho Convention (ABC) Leader Thomas Thabane spoke of the potential for "peaceful mass action" (REFTEL). In meetings with the diplomatic community and others, Basotho National Party (BNP) Leader General Lekhanya was more explicit in calling for a work stoppage and other civil disturbances (as was the small monarchist Marematlou Freedom Party, or MFP) to pressure the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the GOL to address their complaints about procedures during the February 17 National Assembly election. On Tuesday, February 27, leaflets and rumors circulated in Maseru and other district capitals that a work stoppage would occur on Wednesday, February 28.

3. There were no civil disturbances of note on February 28, and the work stoppage did not materialize. While fewer taxis were present at taxi stands in the morning hours, possibly while their drivers gauged the potential for action against public transportation, by mid-morning a normal flow of taxis was observed. Messages from the Lesotho Mounted Police Service were heard on popular radio stations instructing listeners to inform the authorities about individuals advocating civil disturbances.

A Good Sign

¶4. COMMENT: The "strike that wasn't" is a good sign for the acceptance of election results in Lesotho, or at least a sign that the Basotho people are not prepared for a repeat of past election-related violence as occurred in 1998. Sources report that the ABC was persuaded by at least one other SADC member country to withdraw its support of and participation in the February 28 event. Calls for strikes and other disturbances were loosely organized and do not appear to have been well received by the general population. While the acceptance of election results is still not a foregone conclusion, this week's events bode well for democratic consolidation in the Mountain Kingdom, or at least peaceful efforts to address post-polling grievances. END COMMENT.

PERRY